

Rt.Hon. R Halfon, MP
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith St
London
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Dear Minister,

CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF LEVEL 2 QUALIFICATIONS WITHIN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

We would firstly like to extend our formal congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education at the Department for Education and look forward to working with you on a range of issues for the greater good of our young people within the education system and those on or moving on to transitional programmes such as Traineeships, T Level and apprenticeship qualifications.

We are writing to you on this occasion to request that you and the Department reconsider and resist any potential policy announcement on the removal of any level 2 and below qualifications that currently exist within the construction sector. However, as a more general observation, looking across the whole economy around 27% of all jobs are still at level 2 or below, so they are also vitally important to the overall UK economy.

Specifically, for construction, operational employees account for 59% of the entire industry's workforce, which is still mainly at level 2 and below. Level 2 is more important to construction than many other sectors, as without level 2 qualifications, we will be largely unable to deliver competent workers necessary to retrofit 29 million existing properties in the UK nor build the renewable energy sources and carbon capture facilities.

Additionally, without these essential level 2 qualifications we will not be able to improve our civil engineering and utilities infrastructure to mitigate flooding, droughts and pollution. All of this will need major input by individuals with level 2 practical skills in construction, maintenance and operation.

Furthermore, tackling climate change is threatened by not producing enough people with entry and trade level construction skills at level 2 and below.

Also, the construction sector more than some other sectors, affords life changing opportunity to many young people and those often furthest away from the labour market through a number of funded entry level, pre-employability and work ready programmes, these individuals require nurturing and support to even aspire to level 2 qualifications but often progress and develop within the sector for a number of years thereafter.

Removing or restricting entry level programmes would do a significant disservice and impact the social mobility of this particular cohort group.

In spite of the potential slowdown in the economy our sector still desperately needs to expand our operational workforce, by around 92,000 jobs per year partly due to the following;

- The impact of Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit has over the last few years resulted in an overall decline in the workforce of around 9%.
- Construction apprenticeship starts for the operational workforce at level 2 have declined, from around 18-20,000 three years ago to less than 11,000, arising in part from the implementation of the government's policy on new Apprenticeship Standards and the Levy.

Competence is also critical for the future of construction industry, with the implications of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the Building Safety Act 2022 (HM Government, 2022) still to be worked through. However, recruitment of sufficient numbers of competent people at level 2 has been a long-standing challenge in the sector, and with an aging workforce the skills gap is accelerating.

Regrettably, the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 and the T Levels qualifications will do virtually nothing to address the problems facing the sector at the operational level. Any hasty announcement by the Department to remove or restrict level 2 funding will only serve to exacerbate this situation.

This decision would therefore create an existential threat to the future of the construction industry and the UK's ability to deliver on the levelling-up agenda, affect the social mobility and inclusivity that the sector has worked hard to create and harm the skills level necessary to achieve a green and sustainable economy.

We urge you to reconsider the position particularly for this fundamental sector in support of the wider UK economy.

Yours sincerely,



Martyn Price, MBE
Chair, CCATF



Graham Hasting-Evans
MSc, C.Eng MICE, FIC-CMC, President BACH.